

**Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center**  
**Avalanche Advisory**

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Happy New Year, this is Kevin Davis with the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center. This advisory is valid for today, December 31<sup>st</sup> 2010, with an outlook for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and the hazard rating will remain valid through midnight, December 31<sup>st</sup>. Special thanks to Idaho Parks and Recreation for sponsoring this morning's avalanche advisory. Thanks also goes out to Dave Alley and the Silver Mountain Ski Patrol for sending us pit data from the Mountain. Sounds like great skiing.

As you may have heard there was an avalanche fatality in the southern portion of our forecast region. The incident occurred on 12-29-10 in the East Fork Big Creek drainage to the northeast of Calder, Id. One individual triggered an avalanche in a N-NE facing bowl at about 5,500 feet. Avalanche conditions were high during the day of this accident and though the conditions have stabilized to where natural avalanches are not occurring, the take home message is to be very careful of the terrain you're in.

Across our forecast region the weather today is expected to be cold, clear, and calm with only a slight east wind. High's will be in the single digits in the mountains dropping to near zero tonight. The outlook for Saturday and Sunday is for sunny skies New Years Day with high's in the low teens and calm winds. Sunday will roll in with the high pressure exiting the region and a slight SW flow returning and bringing warmer temperatures and the next round of weather. **The avalanche conditions will remain at considerable due to cold temperatures weakening the upper snowpack for the outlook period.**

**Avalanche conditions for the entire Idaho Panhandle National Forest Advisory Area are rated as CONSIDERABLE on all aspects greater than 30 degrees above 5,000 feet.** Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are **probable**. **Avalanche conditions are rated as MODERATE aspects less than 30 degrees.** Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible.

The weather that lead up to the high avalanche danger we experienced on Wednesday was a very rapid load of snow on a sensitive layer of surface hoar that is widespread on all aspects throughout the mountain ranges of North Idaho. In Avery, Ed related to me that the Lost Lake snotel received 27 inches of snow in a 3 day period from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup>. The surface hoar formed during the high-pressure over Christmas and was subsequently buried and preserved intact on all aspects. The snowpack we are seeing in the upper 3 feet is very tricky indeed now since we have a firm ice crust as a smooth bed

surface to slide on with weakening snow above, a widespread weak surface hoar layer, and a couple of semi-supportive layers in between. On Thursday at Silver Mountain, Ski Patrol found a weak layer and easy, clean shears 2 feet deep with the light powder on a firmer old snow layer. Near Lookout Pass, Carole found the 4 foot deep surface hoar layer to be very weak with easy to moderate shears in all stress tests. She mentioned that windloaded areas could be even more sensitive. In the Cabinet Mountains yesterday, in Auxor Basin, we found widespread avalanche activity from Wednesday's cycle on most NW-NE aspects above 5,000 feet. We got shooting cracks on a south aspect. In our stability tests on north and south aspects, however, we were not able to get the surface hoar layer to shear but it was plainly visible at 2 feet deep on the north and 18 inches deep on the south aspects. The bottom line for your travels for today and this weekend is to assume that all slopes steeper than 30 degrees that have not slid, could slide with your additional weight added to it. Cold temperatures will not stabilize weak layers. Avoid steep wind-loaded slopes. With this persistent weak layer and the structure of the layers in the upper 3 feet of the pack, the clues may not be jumping out at you. You'll have to be more diligent on getting the information you need to travel safely. Use good route finding and pay attention to the slopes that have slid, you'll see the blocks of debris.

This is a good time to hone your avalanche skills by taking an avalanche course. There are two great resources in our area for avalanche education. Shep Snow offers certified courses out of Sandpoint and teaches the field sessions at Schweitzer Mountain. For more information go to, <http://thesnowschoo.com/>. Peak Adventures, in Cataldo, Idaho, is offering an avalanche awareness course the first weekend after New Year's Eve. For more information see their website at <https://peaksnowcats.com/>.

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (**Free**) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter in Coeur d' Alene on January 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, St. Maries January 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, and in Bonners Ferry February 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at [www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov](http://www.parksandrecreation.idaho.gov), or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers this winter. Our next course will be a day in the life of a backcountry powderhound, "What do you need to know, when, where, and how do I get the information I need, right now!" That will be offered 1/5/11 and is a slight change from what we have been advertising, but don't miss it. Then, "What we can learn from ten years of avalanche accident review in North Idaho", offered 2/9/11. These are offered at the new Forest Service Building in Sandpoint at 6PM and are **Free to the public**. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 752-5130. So far Dan has a workshop scheduled for January 22<sup>nd</sup> at 9AM and will be an interactive class focusing on avalanche dynamics. In Avery, contact Ed Odegard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel

free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area.